

Toronto's 2022 Population Health Profile

Date: February 6, 2023

To: Board of Health

From: Medical Officer of Health

Wards: All

SUMMARY

Toronto's 2022 Population Health Profile (Attachment 1) provides an overview of city's health status using available local data to help understand the collective health needs of Toronto residents. Building on the comprehensive 2019 [T.O. Health Check: An Overview of Toronto's Population Health Status](#) report, this profile provides updated information on the health status of Toronto's population.

Toronto Public Health is responsible for [assessing and reporting on the health status of the city's population](#). This information can be used by Toronto Public Health, other divisions in the City of Toronto, health care partners, social service agencies, and other public and private sector organizations to prepare impactful interventions to improve health outcomes for residents.

Key findings from Toronto's 2022 Population Health Profile are:

- Torontonians are aging and increasingly diverse;
- Torontonians are negatively impacted by the effects of an increasingly expensive city;
- Climate change presents a significant and growing health risk, despite improvements in Toronto's natural and built environment;
- Mental illnesses and mental health have worsened during the pandemic, with some groups more affected;
- Opioid overdoses reached record levels in 2021;
- There was a significant decrease in testing and screening for many sexually transmitted infections during the pandemic period;
- Chronic disease and its risks are increasing, as is the number of Torontonians who are overdue for health screening; and
- Infectious diseases will continue to emerge globally, presenting threats to Toronto's population.

The findings in this report identify updated population health concerns, give examples of health inequities, and inform opportunities for upstream intervention. Meaningful progress can be made to improve the health outcomes of all Torontonians with ongoing monitoring and comprehensive evidence-based services and interventions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Medical Officer of Health recommends that the:

1. Board of Health endorse the proposed next steps as outlined in this report.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There is no financial impact associated with the adoption of the recommendations in this report.

DECISION HISTORY

On September 23, 2019, the Board of Health adopted, with amendments, [Item HL9.1, T.O. Health Check: An Overview of Toronto's Population Health Status](#), which included a comprehensive health status assessment report, [T.O. Health Check: An Overview of Toronto's Population Health Status](#).

COMMENTS

The goals of Toronto Public Health are to maintain and improve the health of the population, reduce health inequities, and to prepare for, and respond to, health emergencies. These cumulative efforts increase and preserve wellbeing, prolong life, and help reduce burden on the healthcare system.

Understanding the current health status of the population through a population health profile is an important step in achieving these goals. Collecting and using population health and surveillance data are also requirements under the Ministry of Health's [Ontario Public Health Standards: Requirements for Programs, Services, and Accountability](#), to ensure that local public health programs and services reflect current and evolving population health needs.

Although this is not a comprehensive health status report, where possible, this report provides an update to trends captured in the 2019 [T.O. Health Check: An Overview of Toronto's Population Health Status](#) report. This is accomplished through an overview of Toronto's current demographics and updated insights into specific health indicators affecting Torontonians. Three focused topic areas illustrate the complexity of some of the health indicators and their associated interventions and strategies. These focused topics are: mental health, human papillomavirus vaccination, and liver cancer.

Report findings:

Toronto's 2022 Population Health Profile shows that our city is home to a population diverse in gender, sexual orientation, age, country of birth, and race. Toronto's population is aging, and we expect increasing rates of chronic disease, exacerbated by the decreased rates of screening during the pandemic. Inconsistent and reduced testing for infectious diseases has resulted in missed opportunities for treatment and challenges in describing the burden of specific diseases. At the same time, Torontonians experienced worsening mental health, and health risks associated with an increasing cost of living. Toronto residents also have more health threats related to climate change, particularly from extreme weather.

Torontonians are aging and increasingly diverse

Census data show that Toronto is home to an aging population. The share of seniors aged 65+ years increased from 16% to 17% between 2016 and 2021. In addition, Toronto's population is increasingly diverse with 56% of individuals belonging to a racialized group in 2021 (an 8% increase since 2016). More than one in four Torontonians speak a language at home that is neither English nor French. The pandemic had a negative impact on immigration rates; this contributed to a slowing of population growth since the last census update (4% growth noted between 2011 and 2016 compared to 2% noted from 2016 to 2021).

Torontonians are negatively impacted by the effects of an increasingly expensive city

In 2021, nearly one in five individuals experienced household food insecurity in the past year. At the same time, the rising cost of housing contributed to 40% of Toronto tenant households spending more than 30% of their household income on shelter costs in 2021, a trend that was temporarily improved due to federal emergency relief during the pandemic. Homelessness continues to be a pressing issue with over 7,300 people experiencing homelessness on any given night in 2021. As of late 2022, over 9,700 individuals actively used the shelter system in the past three months.

Climate change presents a significant and growing health risk, despite improvements in Toronto's natural and built environment

Health promoting achievements in Toronto's environment include a reduction in lead in drinking water, more swimmable beach days, and increases in tree canopy cover. However, climate change poses a significant risk to the health of Torontonians as the city has experienced increased temperatures and more days with extreme weather. Climate change can cause damage to property and infrastructure and exacerbate chronic conditions due to heat exposure or worsening air quality. Climate change can also facilitate the spread of climate-sensitive infectious diseases.

Mental illnesses and mental health have worsened during the pandemic, with some groups more affected

The COVID-19 pandemic has negatively impacted mental health and increased the need for services and interventions. The monthly rate of mental health and addiction-

related outpatient visits increased from 5 per 100 population prior to the COVID-19 pandemic (January 2019 to March 2020) to 6 per 100 population for the first two years of the pandemic (April 2020 to December 2021). Given that many medical offices were closed and that virtual and online assessments are not captured in the rates provided, the impact of the pandemic period on mental health is likely underestimated by these data. Among youth, less than half of Toronto students rated their mental health as very good or excellent prior to the pandemic. Some data indicates that this has worsened since the start of the pandemic. The 2021 Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey found that 59% of Ontario students stated that the pandemic has made them feel depressed about the future and 39% reported that it has made their mental health worse.¹

Opioid overdoses reached record levels in 2021

Opioid toxicity deaths in Toronto rose to 591 confirmed deaths in 2021. These are all preventable deaths. Many factors, including stigma and discrimination, prevent individuals from accessing services and impact the health of people who use drugs.

There was a significant decrease in testing and screening for many sexually transmitted infections during the pandemic period

The number of reported cases of many infectious diseases, especially sexually transmitted infections (STIs) such as chlamydia and gonorrhea, decreased during the COVID-19 pandemic. This likely reflected reduced primary care visits and routine screening. For example, there was an almost 40% decrease in routine STI testing between 2019 and 2021. In this context, the 2021 rise in syphilis cases is especially concerning. These missed opportunities for treatment may lead to continued transmission and long-term health outcomes. Without appropriate testing rates, trends cannot be identified across the population, which contributes to challenges with treating current infections and preventing future ones.

Chronic disease and its risks are increasing, as is the number of Torontonians who are overdue for health screening

The prevalence of diabetes among those aged 20 years and older continued to increase with the rate going from 11,936 per 100,000 people in 2011 to 13,008 per 100,000 people in 2020. An increasing proportion of Torontonians were overdue for breast, cervical, and colorectal cancer screenings in 2020. This increases the risk of later stage diagnoses and poorer outcomes. In addition, pre-pandemic data showed that nearly 25% of children and youth had not visited a dental professional for preventative oral care in the previous year; this is expected to have worsened as a result of pandemic-related closures.

¹ Boak, A. Elton-Marshall, T., and Hamilton, H.A. (2022). The well-being of Ontario students: Findings from the 2021 Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey (OSDUHS). Toronto, ON: Centre for Addiction and Mental Health.

Infectious diseases will continue to emerge globally, presenting threats to Toronto's population

The introduction and spread of emerging diseases, such as COVID-19 shows that the close proximity of human and animal habitats is one factor that creates conditions for new viruses to emerge and spread globally. Lessons learned from the COVID-19 response, along with leveraging of pre-existing relationships with community partners, helped public health successfully control the local mpox outbreak in 2022. This illustrates how public health practice and emergency preparedness can benefit from application of knowledge gained during the COVID-19 pandemic response.

Next Steps:

Toronto's 2022 Population Health Profile provides insights on the range of health issues facing our city. Toronto Public Health and other City and community partners, including other levels of government can respond to these findings and work to identify the interventions that can best improve the health of all Torontonians.

Toronto Public Health is planning to report to the Board of Health in 2023 on three key issues facing Toronto residents identified in the Population Health Profile: mental health, climate change and Toronto's aging population. This work will include:

- An action plan for a public health approach to addressing mental health and wellness including actions for local, provincial and federal partners;
- A review of the public health impacts of climate change with a specific focus on Toronto; and
- Additional information regarding Toronto's aging population, including anticipated population health impacts and actions that Toronto Public Health is taking to address them.

These reports, along with findings in the Population Health Profile report, will help guide Toronto Public Health's work plan and strategic planning during this term of Council. Staff will establish priorities and develop a new strategic plan based, in part, on the findings of the Population Health Profile. A report with more information on the Strategic Plan will be brought to the Board of Health no later than Q1 2024.

Some of the findings in the Population Health Profile are actively being addressed. For example, in response to the ongoing drug poisoning crisis, in 2022, the Board of Health directed Toronto Public Health to review and update the Toronto Drug Strategy. In December 2022, staff launched a Reference Group to review and provide feedback on proposed recommendations and outline for an updated Toronto Drug Strategy. Staff plan to bring the new Drug Strategy to the Board of Health for approval in 2023. As well, at its January 16, 2023 meeting, the Board of Health directed the Medical Officer of Health to convene a working table with experts on the intersection of housing and homelessness and report back to the Board at the earliest opportunity. In addition to convening the working table, Toronto Public Health is collaborating with other City divisions on cross-corporate affordable housing initiatives.

Issues related to sexual health promotion, chronic disease prevention and emergency preparedness will also be addressed through planned reports to the Board of Health on Toronto Public Health's new strategic plan and long-term priorities.

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SIGNATURE

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ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Toronto's 2022 Population Health Profile